THE
RECONSTRUCTIONIST

DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM AS A RELIGIOUS CIVILIZATION, TO THE UPBUILDING OF ISRAEL'S ANCIENT HOMELAND, AND TO THE FURTHERANCE OF UNIVERSAL FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Vol. I. November 15, 1935 Heshvan 19, 5696 No. 14

EDITORIALS

A PROGRAM FOR JEWISH SOCIAL WORKERS

THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF JEWISH COOPERATION

CONFUSING THE ISSUE OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

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THE FUTURE OF THE JEW IN SOVIET RUSSIA

By Samuel Dinin

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A NOTE ON THE GOD IDEA IN JUDAISM

By Mordecai M. Kaplan

—o—

Published by

THE SOCIETY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM

15 West 86th Street, New York, N. Y.

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The RECONSTRUCTIONIST is published bi-weekly for twenty consecutive issues starting in October, by The Society for the Advancement of Judaism, 15 West 86th St., New York, N. Y. Subscription $1.00 a year; foreign $1.25; individual copy 10 cents. Entered as second class matter January 9, 1935, at the Post Office, New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.
The editorials represent the opinions of the editors only.

EDITORIALS

A Program for Jewish Social Workers

THOSE who are somewhat familiar with conditions in the field of Jewish social work know that a large number of social workers have turned Communist; even some of the executives in the social agencies are said to have joined the Communist ranks. Jews who are interested in Jewish life have good reason to be disturbed over this development. Their natural impulse, however, to condemn these social workers with a blanket condemnation will not serve any purpose. A much more constructive attitude would be to try to understand what is responsible for the situation.

It is undoubtedly true that philanthropists usually look upon social work as a phase of philanthropy. The clients who are served are poor, or sick, or aged; they are maladjusted as a result of one or all of these circumstances. The philanthropists therefore expect that the social worker as their representative should approach his work as they would if they were to do so themselves. He should think of serving these unfortunates, and consider himself and what he can get out of his work as a secondary consideration. The social worker, on the other hand, makes a living out of his job; and although he may feel that the character of his work requires certain professional standards, and is distinguishable from skilled industrial work, he nevertheless realizes that he is a worker, and that his own standard of living and his own security are dependent upon the extent to which he organizes with his fellow-workers for protection. So far so good: it is highly likely that if the point of view of the social worker were presented in these terms to the philanthropists, amicable arrangements might be made to reckon with any problem of hours, wages and conditions of work.

But the unfortunate fact is this: that the workers who have the leadership and organizational ability to create social workers' federations are usually Communists. On principle they are not at all interested in social work as such nor in Jewish social work in particular. According to their Communist ideology, charity is not a good in itself; it is a festering sore on the capitalist body politic. To encourage charity is to encourage the continuation of an evil system; and to encourage the acceptance of charity is to distract the minds of the clients from their true interests, which is the establishment of a society in which charity would not be necessary. They oppose Jewish philanthropy in particular because they are opposed to the separatist Jewish group life altogether. For them, the only conceivable reason for maintaining Jewish life at all is to foster Jewish religion; and since they

are unalterably opposed to religion in any form, they oppose the advancement of Jewish life.

The resulting situation has therefore been an anomalous one; those Jews who agreed that social workers should be given the rights to which all workers are entitled, found themselves strange bedfellows with the Communists. They felt bound to support the social workers in their controversies with social agencies. On the other hand, if they had Jewish life at heart at all, they realized that they could not long continue to cooperate with the Communists who seemed to agitate more for partisan ends than for immediate economic objectives.

At the Lake Placid conference last June, the social workers who were interested in Jewish life finally organized an opposition group, and since then their strength has increased. They hope to attract large numbers to their ranks on a two-fold platform: (1) a militant stand for their rights as workers, and (2) a positive Jewish program. The first they envisage clearly; unfortunately, they are uncertain about the concrete Jewish program which they can offer. At present they are attempting to interest the non-Communists in Labor Zionism.

But we are quite certain that the appeal in terms of Labor Zionism will not succeed; not because Labor Zionism is invalid as a point of view in regard to the future of Palestine. We too are Labor Zionists. But Labor Zionism is only one aspect of the entire problem of Jewish life, and fails to reckon with the unique problems that face the Jewish people in the diaspora. What the social workers need is a comprehensive philosophy of Jewish life, which sees the problem as a whole. Such a point of view the RECONSTRUCTIONIST represents, and we heartily commend its adoption by those social workers who see the need of meeting the challenge of Communism.

Certainly Jewish life will not be built up by the philanthropists, who have shown themselves to be assimilationists on more occasions than one. If the social workers would devote part of their time to grappling with the problem of reconstructing Jewish life, they would gain the wholehearted support of the masses of Jewish contributors in their efforts to better their economic position, and they would find ready cooperation on the part of the Jewish population who are seeking an intelligent program of Jewish life. With a strong organization of social workers banded together on such a platform, they could well capture the control of their organization, and force out of Jewish social work those elements which today have no business in the field.

The Highest Level of Jewish Cooperation

WITH so much in American-Jewish life that spells chaos, it is heartening to be able to point to an evidence of emergent creation. As a rule the beginnings of light and order come unannounced and for a long time are invisible to the average person. But we Jews cannot afford to miss the least glimmer of better things to come. One such sign for American Jewry is the dawning of community-mindedness. Here and there Jews are beginning to understand that there is a world of difference between a Jewish aggregation and a Jewish community. They are beginning to realize that a babel of competing organizations of all kinds, religious, social and philanthropic, each one crying up its own wares and jealous of the appeal which the others possess, has nothing in common with social solidarity governed by the principle "all for each and each for all," or with an organic community in which the salvation or self-fulfillment of the individual is the concern of the group. But even more significant is the fact that in a number of the smaller cities Jews are beginning to discuss seriously the possibility of forming Jewish communities, and in a few cases they have actually taken the steps to do so. For the sake of what is involved in the process of communal gestation,

it is highly important that care be exercised in the means and measures taken to further it.

We refer especially to the experiment in communal organization that is being carried on in Harrisburgh, Pennsylvania. Largely through the stimulation of the Jewish Welfare Board a movement was launched there recently to consolidate the social center, the congregations, the schools and the philanthropic agencies into a working body. The man entrusted with the task is Dr. Jacob Golub who has achieved a fine reputation as an educational theorist and organizer. Already those interested in the question of Jewish communal organization are watching anxiously for the outcome of the experiment. It therefore behooves those Harrisburgh Jews who are taking a leading part in the reorganization of the Jewish activities in their city to reckon with a number of important principles that are apt to be overlooked.

They must take full cognizance of the philosophy of the community movement. Jewish leaders and workers must appreciate the indispensability of ideas. Ideas are the instruments of intelligence. It is no more possible to build a social organization without ideas than it is possible to put up a house without the use of hammers and hatchets and planes. An ideology is to a social builder what a tool chest is to a carpenter. It is the business of all who take a part in the establishment of the Jewish community to provide themselves with adequate intellectual tools for what they are doing, and with expertness in manipulating them. These intellectual tools must be duplicated in large number. The ideas which set forth the meaning and purpose of community organization from the standpoint of Judaism as a whole and every individual Jew in particular, must be popularized and made integral to the Jewish consciousness through the process of education in all its stages. The idea of Jewish community must be made as much part of the Jewish school curriculum as Jewish ceremonies and observances, and all possible pedagogic devices must be employed to include it. It must be preached from the pulpit and taught to the adult study group. All this must be carried on in the spirit of a movement that is meant to do for the future of Jewish life in the diaspora what Zionism is meant to do for the future of Jewish life in Palestine.

Jewish leaders are usually afraid of ideas and delude themselves into believing that work gets best done when there is least talk about it. The alternative to having and communicating ideas about communal organization is basing it on the lowest common denominator. This is why Jews have gotten no further in their organized activity in this country than fighting anti-Semitism, or dispensing aid to their poor. If the Jews in Harrisburgh, for example, will insist upon keeping out all philosophies of communal life and making the fiscal advantage the chief rationale for coordinating their social agencies, they will inevitably adopt the *lowest* common denominator as the basis of cooperation. The gymnasium and the movies in the Center will form the main rallying point of Jewish life. And the opponents of the community movement will be right in contending that the mountains have quaked only to send forth a mouse.

In the effort to give an ideological background to the community movement, the aim should be to evolve the *highest* common denominator of Jewish cooperation. With that aim in mind there is but one logical conclusion as to the institution which must form the rallying point in a normal Jewish community. Not the hospital, nor the orphan asylum, nor even the Center, but the synagogue. For what else is the synagogue, if not an attempt to incarnate the *highest* common denominator of Jewish cooperation? This does not mean that the congregational groups should become the community, or even the dominant factor in the community. It means that the highest purpose of Jewish

cooperation should be the furtherance of Jewish education and Jewish worship. The fact that not all Jews subscribe to the same type of Jewish education and Jewish worship makes it more difficult for this purpose to be met nowadays than it was in the past. Nonetheless, it must be met even at the cost of having to provide a variety of forms in education and worship. In time, the number of forms will inevitably be reduced. Once the Jewish community definitely adopts this *highest* common denominator as its aim, its status in the American political set-up will be clearly defined. It will be the status not of a minority secular group, but of an ethical society.

Confusing The Issue of Religious Liberty

THE tercentenary of Roger Williams was recently celebrated at the National Baptist Memorial Church in Washington, D. C. At the celebration banquet Mr. Roger Williams Straus delivered an address entitled "Religious Liberty: Civilization's Barometer," which has now been published in pamphlet form. The late Oscar S. Straus was evidently a great admirer of Roger Williams, for he named his son after the founder of Providence Plantations (later known as Rhode Island), and apparently imbued his son with an enthusiasm for religious liberty, for Mr. Straus today is very active in the so-called "good will" movements for the creation of better understanding between Jews and Christians.

The thesis which Mr. Straus propounds in his address is this: that when civilization flourishes and trade and industry develop we usually find that religious liberty enjoys a corresponding efflorescence; when religious liberty is curtailed, disintegration and poverty are experienced. We need not concern ourselves overmuch about this thesis as it is presented by Mr. Straus because, in the first place, he concedes significant exceptions. For example, in Spain for one hundred twenty-five years after the Treaty of Granada with the Moors, "prosperity and culture increased" while "there was to be found less and less and finally no religious freedom at all." Secondly, Mr. Straus himself admits that he is unable to determine whether religious liberty is a cause or an effect of an expanding civilization. His indecision nullifies whatever value the thesis might have; for if religious liberty were the cause of an expanding civilization we should know at once how to bring about recovery. If it were the effect, we should stop preaching about it and proceed to reconstruct the social order, letting the effect follow upon the cause naturally.

But it is not Mr. Straus' thesis which we should like to comment upon as much as its subject, Religious Liberty, the principle that "each man should be permitted to worship his God in his own way." We maintain that this issue is absolutely dead. There are no zealots in America today advocating that all Americans should belong to the same Church and should all be forced to worship God in the same way. As a matter of fact, interest in religion has waned to such a point in our day that it is absurd to imagine that we are suffering the recrudescence of religious persecution similar to the Spanish Inquisition. Why then all this to-do about Religious Liberty and Freedom of Conscience?

The fact is that Mr. Straus and all the men of "good will" confuse the issue; what they call "religious persecution" is not religious persecution at all, but *race* persecution. We are not faced with fanatics who want to convert Jews to another faith; we are confronted with discrimination against members of a certain "race", in the social, political and economic sphere. The Nazis have said very explicitly that their antagonism is directed against the race, and not against the religion. It is only because of the influence of Reformist Judaism that the confusion arose. Conceiving of the Jews as a religious community, they fell into the error of thinking

that persecution of the Jews constituted the persecution of a religious community, and hence constituted "religious persecution." The fallacy has caused a great deal of irrelevant pleading in the name of Religious Liberty and Roger Williams.

What we should strive for today is not the right to worship God according to the dictates of our conscience; that we have. We should strive for the right of every person, no matter what his race, religion, tradition or color may be, to equal economic and political opportunities. We submit that basically this is exactly what Mr. Straus wants to achieve. If so, let him understand clearly the realities of the situation; he is dealing with the persecution of minorities.

In that case, the thesis, we believe, is quite clear: the persecution of minorities is definitely the effect of economic and political disintegration, insofar as it is related to economic and political conditions. Since the relationship is a very close one, every effort to ameliorate the lot of minorities in our country must include a program for the reconstruction of our economy on the principles of justice and righteousness.

On the other hand, if the issue is not clearly conceived and men cry, "There is no religious liberty" when there *is*, they distract our people from the main task, of reorganizing our social order so that minorities will no longer be the victims of political and economic discrimination.

The Future of The Jew in Soviet Russia

By Samuel Dinin

TO be or not to be is not the question as far as the Jew in Russia is concerned. The Jew will survive and even thrive in the land of the Soviets for some, and probably for many generations. Jewish life and Jewish culture will survive along with the Jew. The question, however, is: will the Jewish life that survives be creative; will it have continuity with the Jewish past and kinship to the Jewish present; will its future be bound up with the future of the rest of Israel?

The answer to this question depends upon three things: one's evaluation of the facts of present Jewish existence in Soviet Russia; one's reading of the Jewish past, and explanation of the causes of Jewish survival; and one's definition of what constitutes Judaism or Jewish culture. For David Goldberg* there is only one answer to the above question. The Jew in Russia will survive; he will merge from his present ideological and economic struggles purified and free; he will create a new life and a new spirit; he will be a light to the Jews living a life of exile, of insecurity and despair, in fascist and capitalist lands.

No one can quarrel with Goldberg's presentation and evaluation of the facts of Jewish existence in Soviet Russia, for Goldberg is as honest as he is lucid and persuasive. He knows what the Jews went through and are going through, and he realizes that life for them is still not a bed of roses. He himself takes occasion to point out that "no other national minority has had to submit so wholly to liquidation 'as a class' as has had the Jew, since the Jew alone was nearly wholly bourgeois; and no other element within the empire was so unprepared psychologically and ideologically to persevere under the ordeal that inheres in the process of class liquidation." However, the Jews had to undergo the tribulations of liquidation because they were bourgeois, and not because they were Jews. As a bourgeois class, the Jews have been liquidated—many of them have even been killed or exiled or disciplined as saboteurs and political enemies of the State—but as in-

*"Sussman Sees It Through," Bloch Publishing Co., N. Y., 1935.

dividuals they have been permitted to do penance for their bourgeois sins and to re-emerge as new and reconstructed members of the proletarian state. So that for the vast majority of the Jews today, the problem of liquidation is a problem of the past; they have found new places in the scheme of Soviet economy, and their economic future is as secure and as assured as the future of Soviet Russia itself.

Nor need we fear, says Goldberg, that as a result of the removal of all obstacles to Jews' settling where they please, the Jews will flock to the capitals and to the industrial centers. This removal will affect only a few tens of thousands; the bulk of Jewry will remain an adhesive mass, which will, in time, evolve a new Jewish culture. Neither should we be afraid that as a result of the removal of the religious prohibition against intermarriage, the Jews will intermarry and assimilate and disappear. "The statistical records of intermarriage in Soviet Russia since the Revolution have only proved what might have been *a priori* assumed as true, namely, that where the Jewish group is homogeneously strong, as in the former Pale, the Gentiles marrying into it are absorbed by the Jews; and vice versa, where the Gentile group is homogeneously strong, as in the central states, the Jew is absorbed by them. On the whole, however, the cases of intermarriage weren't numerous enough to affect the complexion of either group, and every case was an exceptional one." The Jews are three million strong in Russia. They are biologically self-sustaining. They are provided with the physical conditions which will permit them to continue existing as a homogeneity. There is no incentive to intermarriage, no tendency to bid for a Gentile front. On the contrary, there is every incentive for the Jew to associate himself with his group and to cultivate his own uniqueness as a Jew in the Communist milieu.

But what about religion and Hebrew and Zionism in Soviet Russia? Goldberg admits that the Jewish religion is doomed in Russia. He admits too that there is a ban on the study of Hebrew and proscription of Zionist activities. But to him religion is only one aspect of Judaism, and "destroying an aspect is not the same as destroying the sources from which it is derived. . . . If only the Jew survives, he will be certain to produce other aspects." The Jew survived for long stretches of time without Hebrew and without engaging in Zionist activities. There was Jewish life before the Synagogue emerged, and a Jewish nation or people before Israel settled in the Promised Land.

Accept the revolution as a fact, as we must, and the ideological metamorphosis implied in the thinking of those who had to accept it as a fact. And consider the Synagogue in the light of this fact. The content of the Judaism professed and practiced in the Synagogue is utterly at odds with the new requirements and the new standards of the Jewish community. With the Synagogue perpetuating social inequalities, and mirroring "the arrogance of the self-appointed elite in Jewish society towards him whom they regarded as mere sub-soil, the worker," what place can it have in a Communist Jewish life? There can be thus no future in Soviet Russia for the Synagogue as at present constituted. But viewed historically, what is the Synagogue? It was originally a meeting place, and then a house of study, a center of learning and culture. And where will you better find exemplified the ideals of the ancient Synagogue than in the clubs or houses of culture in Soviet Russia today, many of them housed in what were formerly Synagogue structures? Who knows: perhaps the Synagogue will yet be recreated in Russia and restored to its original purpose and eminence!

Goldberg tries to explain what is happening in regard to Hebrew and Zionism. The Jews have not spoken Hebrew for over two thousand years. They have lived all this time without Hebrew as a national tongue. Their major creations during this period have been in language other than

Hebrew. To the Jews in pre-revolutionary Russia, Hebrew was a dead language, spoken by very few. The masses spoke and read Yiddish; it is in fact their national tongue. In what other land have the Jews such an opportunity to use and develop their national tongue on as large a scale? In White Russia and the Ukraine it is one of the official languages, the language not only of the schools and the press, and the theatre, but the language of the courts and the wireless and even the street signs. In Biro Bidjan it is *the* national tongue, and in other parts of the country it may yet become the official language. It is the language of the large masses outside of Russia, the few hundred thousand in Palestine notwithstanding.

And this Zion—poor little Zion! No one is opposed to the colonization of Palestine, particularly if Jews must simply get out of the countries they are in and have no other place to go. But what future has Zion, what good will it do the good men and true who go there, even if they ultimately number three million strong? For Zion has always been a football in the struggle of empires, and the number of years the Jewish people has lived in Palestine is small in comparison with the number of years they have spent in lands outside of Palestine. The bubble that is Palestine today will soon burst, and where will the Jews be then? Maybe the conscience of mankind will not let the Jews be exiled from their land when the next day of Zion's doom arrives, as in ancient times; maybe they will not let them be slaughtered like Ethiopian black sheep; but what is to prevent the Jews from escaping from Zion (the old Exodus method) in droves—as they did in every critical period in their history—once it gets too hot for them, and their homes and their livelihoods are no longer secure? Granted even that the wildest dreams of the Zionists are realized, what proportion of the Jewish people can be taken care of in Palestine? There are 16 million Jews in the world today and Palestine has only 300,000. By the time Palestine has 3 million Jews there may be 20 to 25 million Jews in the world. And the Jewish problem will still be with us.

But there's the real rub. The Bialiks and the Nordaus and the Weizmanns speak of Palestine as the *only* solution to the Jewish problem. They see no future for the Jew without Palestine. They speak of life in the Diaspora as *Galut*, exile. And in this they err, and they err grievously. If the Jews are in exile in any land, then they should attempt to remove these bonds of exile and to normalize their lives in those lands, not to flock en masse to a wasteland where they are ultimately doomed to exodus or expulsion. But the truth is—the Diaspora has not always been exile for the Jew, and does not have to be. The fact is that life in the Diaspora has been the normal existence of the Jew, and life in Palestine the exceptional.

Goldberg feels that Bialik's contention, that "if you look at history from the beginning of time you will find that Jewish centers in the Diaspora have perished one by one, despite their wealth, until nothing has remained of them," cannot stand analysis. "The truth is that the history of Jewish wanderings was a history of the *shifting* of Jewish centers, but *not of their total annihilation.*" It was the same Jew, who, on abandoning one center, proceeded to create elsewhere a new center. And who says Diaspora Judaism was creatively sterile? Are the *Talmud*, the *Midrash*, *Gaonica*, the *Kabbala*, *Hasidism* and *Wissenschaft des Judentums* all Palestine creations?

These super-patriots who cruelly and unjustly predict that Diaspora Jewry and Diaspora Judaism will perish, do not understand that "Jewish nationhood, unlike Gentile nationhood, is organically closer connected with the Diaspora than with Palestine, and rests more on the idea of peoplehood than on the idea of nativity and political territorial sovereignty." Palestine was not the land of Jewish nativity, "only the land they chose to settle

in order to perpetuate those national qualities which they developed in the *Diaspora*: in Chaldea, in Egypt, and the desert." For the truth is, and history will attest it, that without the ability to survive in the *Diaspora*, the Jewish remnant in Palestine must itself perish. For if the few million who will eventually colonize Palestine go native, Diaspora Jewry will be able to "adopt neither their chauvinism nor the culture built upon it." They will either impress their Diaspora character and outlook upon the land and not let the land swallow them up ethnically; that is, "they will sustain themselves by exactly the quality which has sustained the Jewish people in the Diaspora. But if, perchance, they will lose that quality, they will die of either assimilation or of atrophy, *while the Jewries in the Diaspora will be going on forever.*"

Goldberg maintains that a people can be international; it does not depend on land and territory, and therefore transcends them. What binds a people is not a fictitious patriotism but a Thesis. Its religion and ethics and morality are not of the ruling few, but of all the people. To a government of the *people*, peace becomes an indispensable condition. The peoplehood idea of the nationhood kills race hatred and every form of chauvinism and has no place for class exploiting class. The Jewish people survived because it was such a peoplehood. Any nation or state adopting the peoplehood idea can likewise immunize itself against extinction. In Soviet Russia the National Thesis is based on the peoplehood idea; therefore the weal of the people is the goal of the government, and not the fictitious grandeur of the physical state.

But if the thesis of peoplehood is valid, why Biro-Bidjan? True it has been asserted that mere dispersion will not destroy the Jew, but that does not imply "that the Jewish group actually *requires* a state of its dispersion for its well-being. It only means that, having lived more of their historical life in a state of dispersion and *under conditions which prevented their assimilation*, the Jews had been tempered by that very difficult anomalous condition to a point where they could survive against and despite that condition. However we may explain the fact of Jewish survival, we cannot deny that the phenomenon itself is something of an anomaly; that is, if not a *lawless* fact, certainly an *irregular one.*" Biro-Bidjan has been established to do away with this anomaly, to reduce the psychic strain and anguish, which such existence entails. It affords the recalcitrant bourgeois element in Soviet Russia another chance to redeem itself, and to exert an honest effort to give national form to Socialist content. Its progress may have been imperceptible, but it is still in the government's agenda as a distant goal of furnishing the Jews with a cultural-territorial base of their own.

In the light, however, of the terrible plight of Jews in the East-European countries adjacent to Soviet Russia, in the light of the growth of Fascism in those countries and the growing instability of the Jewish future, "Biro-Bidjan as an autonomous Jewish republic under the aegis of the Union of Soviets is much more than an alternative place for the Russian Jew: it is the place of probable refuge for no less than 5,000,000 Jews who are being ground under the wheels of Fascism and can do nothing to placate or appease the wrath of its Thesis, because it frankly calls for their death. As against the frying-pan of the Fascist countries, there is the crucible of the Soviet Union where, if heat and pressure, so to speak, are applied to the Jewish petty bourgeoisie, it is only with a view to have them emerge citizens of the same Socialist state. Biro-Bidjan is the symbol of that crucible for the distraught Jew. Who will assert that a mass immigration of Jews to Biro-Bidjan may not yet come to pass?"

II

What can we say to this impassioned rationalization of the position of the Jew in Soviet Russia, and the glowing predictions regarding his future? One can only

wish they were true. They sound, however, more like dreams and wish-fulfillments than like sober analyses and statements. It is impossible to go into a point for point refutation of Goldberg's thesis and facts: that would require a book in itself. A brief discussion of a few points will have to suffice in an article of this kind.

1. The writer has had occasion to visit Russia. He was fortunate in having innumerable relatives in all parts of Russia, among whom were faithful members of the Communist party as well as those who were dissatisfied with, though not actively opposed to, the present regime. He spent many nights arguing the problems of Jewish survival and of Jewish life with dozens of his cousins and uncles and aunts. And what saddened him everywhere he went and whenever he had these discussions was to find that they didn't care whether Jewish life survived or not. The neo-Jewish Communists were not interested in creating a new international people, nor in perpetuating an old one. They weren't interested in Yiddish culture, nor were they interested in Biro-Bidjan. Most of the young people did not know Yiddish; those who did, rarely spoke it except to the elder generation. Goldberg himself admits that most of those who went to Biro-Bidjan have returned, and that the colonization project has not been a raging success. He explains correctly that there is no immediate urgency for them to go there, because of the economic prosperity in the rest of Soviet Russia. The Jews are economically well enough off where they are—why should they go prospecting in an unknown land? That is why Biro-Bidjan has become a goal for the distant future for the government in Soviet Russia, unless the impossible happens, and hundreds of thousands, if not millions flock to it from Poland and Lithuania and Roumania. The Jews in Soviet Russia don't seem to care about doing away with their anomalous position, and they don't seem aware of the psychic strain and anguish this anomaly brings.

2. The whole argument against Palestine and Zionism is a fantastic turning of the tables. It is true that there are Zionists who "negate" the Diaspora and who see no future for Jewish life in the Diaspora. But to say that that is *the* Zionist philosophy is absurd. We can accept almost in toto Goldberg's evaluation of the concept of peoplehood and of the relationship of the Diaspora to Palestine. The argument for Biro-Bidjan is exactly what the Zionists have been saying for Palestine, and it seems if Goldberg took over bodily the Zionist argument and applied it to Biro-Bidjan. The Zionists, too, wish to do away with the anomalousness of the position of the Jew and to ease, if not abolish, the psychic strain and anguish it brings. But will a Jewish republic in Biro-Bidjan create a normal *Jewish* life for the Jew?

3. The answer to this question depends again on one's concept of Judaism. In one place Goldberg links Judaism with the being and personality of the Jew; so long as a Jew is and survives, what he will be and create will be Judaism. In another, Judaism is called "the sum total of cultural values which the Jewish group had spun out of its experiences in the course of history." This latter definition is altogether acceptable, but Goldberg misses the implications of his own definition. It implies group living, collective functioning and experiencing. Judaism is not the sum total of what every Jew happens to be; it is a social product, a sharing of relationships with all other members of the groups; a way of living acquired as a result of this sharing. When a part of the group is cut off from a large part of the heritage, when it is denied access to one of the languages, if not the chief language of communication with this heritage and with its literature, it will increasingly be unable to share in the relationships with all the other members of the Jewish group, and will in time come to be a distinct entity, further and further removed from the rest of the group. Goldberg decries the analogy between Soviet Jewry and the Karaites; he says the Kara-

ites voluntarily seceded from Jewish life, while the present position of the Jew in Russia was forced on him. The Russian Jew wishes to remain a Jew; he is not seceding from Jewish life. He is trying to remake his life within the framework of the Revolution. This does not alter, however, the essential argument. It may be that the rest of Jewry will follow Russia, and in time what Russian Jewry produces will become *the* Jewish culture. But if Russian Jewish children will be cut off from the Bible and the Talmud and the rest of the Jewish heritage, if they will have no access to Hebrew and to modern Hebrew literature, if all that Jewish religion was and is, is to be branded as false and as reactionary, it is patent that such children will grow up having less and less in common with Jews in other lands, and the possibilities of association, experiencing and working together with other Jews on common grounds—will become more and more remote.

4. The rationalization spun out by Goldberg rests on a "must." We *must* accept the revolution as a fact. Accepting the revolution as a fact, we can understand the anguish of the Sussmans and their desire to find some Jewish way of life within the Communist scheme of things. We can sympathize with the intense spiritual struggles of the Sussmans in coming to their present conclusions; we can respect their honesty and integrity, but in the last analysis, it was not a matter of choice; it was forced upon them. The children of the Sussmans will not have to struggle and suffer spiritually. Their Jewish life is ordained for them—to take or leave. But they will not be free to choose any other way of Jewish living. In the first place they will not know of other ways. In the second place it won't matter any more, and they won't care much. And if by chance some will be taught by subterranean means to love Hebrew and Zion and the Jewish religion, they will have to do penance for it in one way or another.

5. But what makes me doubt that Soviet Russia will ever be the center of a real living, creative Jewish life (if present conditions continue to obtain) is something more fundamental. Goldberg himself ascribes Jewish survival in the Diaspora to a Thesis. The Jews had a Thesis which nurtured them wherever they were, a Thesis which transcended time and place. The Communists today have such a Thesis. This Thesis too is universally appicable, transcending local chauvinisms and patriotisms. This Thesis is a living, crusading force. And like the old Jewish Thesis it is not only an Idea, but a complete way of life. Christianity and Mohammedanism once too came along with Theses. These Theses were universal. You could be a Christian or Mohammedan in any land. You could retain your local national tongue. In accepting Communism, the Soviet Jews have become converted to a new religion. They must accept a new Thesis, a new way of life, and a new way of salvation. As with national groups under Christianity, they are permitted to retain the *form* of national Jewish life and use the Yiddish language. But the *content*, the *essence*, the *way of life*, must be Communistic. Judaism in Christian countries survived as a separate civilization and culture side by side with the Christian civilization. The Communist civilization demands conversion first to its central Thesis and to its way of life.

I must, therefore, conclude, much as my heart rebels against the thought, that there is no future for Jewish life in Russia.

A Note on The God Idea in Judaism

By MORDECAI M. KAPLAN

EVEN to broach the question whether and how the God idea might function in a reconstructed Jewish ideolgoy is to stir up a hornet's nest of possible objections and difficulties. These cannot be dealt with adequately except in an elaborate study of the place of religion in human life. Such a study would have to show how inescapable is religion in any civilization that intends to deal with the whole man and not merely with part of him. There is, however, one hypothesis which, if conceded, establishes at least some common ground for any discussion of religion. That hypothesis is the following: No scheme of life which is intended to help one attain salvation or self-fulfillment, whether in another or in this world, is conceivable without assuming that the nature of reality is inherently such as to be capable of serving as the medium of his salvation. This hypothesis underlies the whole pattern of ideas which in one form or another constitute the conception of God. Of course, if we are incurable pessimists and deny the very possibility of salvation, then we are exempt from concerning ourselves with the God idea. Such pessimism implies that the world is not a fit place for man to live in, and that is tantamount to atheism, unless we supplement this belief with the one that there is or will be some other and more suitable world in which man can obtain self-fulfillment.

With the foregoing hypothesis in mind, it should not be difficult to formulate the process of interpretation whereby the God idea of Jewish tradition might be transformed into a vital element in a modern Jewish ideology. Fortunately, we have at our disposal an excellent illustration of how it is possible to effect this transition from the ancient to what might be a modern Jewish theology. By analyzing the method whereby Ahad Ha'Am succeeds in proving that the Moses tradition can continue to function as a vital element in the modern Jewish consciousness, we can fashion a tool wherewith we might render dynamic much in our religious tradition that seems obsolete and defunct.

The method which Ahad Ha'Am employs in his essay on Moses may be divided into four steps, each of which consists in following out a proposition, which is hardly open to question, to its logical conclusion.

Proposition number one is: Even if a person like the Moses who is described in the Torah did not actually exist, it is an indisputable fact that the idea of Moses figured prominently in the Jewish consciousness for centuries. Hence it was much more of an efficient cause in Jewish life than if there had been an actual man by the name of Moses, but whom no one outside of his immediate circle might have known. This is pointedly illustrated by Ahad Ha'Am when he says: "Goethe's Werther, for instance, was a pure fiction, but his influence on that generation was so immense as to cause a large number of suicides; and therefore he is, in a historical sense, much more truly a real person than this or that actual German of the same period, who lived an actual concrete life and died, and was forgotten, and became as though he had never been."

Proposition number two is: The very conception of the idea Moses as well as the influence which it exerted on the Jewish mind implies that it answered to some deep urge in the nature of the Jewish people. Since the central point in the idea Moses is uncompromising passion for righteousness, we infer that this passion for righteousness has been one of the strongest moving forces in the history of the Jewish people. Thus, irrespective of the historicity of the man Moses, we are certain of the historic fact that in the

inner life of the Jewish people at its best there asserted itself a love of justice and righteousness that was the first of its kind in human annals. That we have other means of verifying this fact in no way weakens the significance of the Moses idea. On the contrary, it only goes to augment that significance.

Proposition number three is: This urge to righteousness is an extremely desirable tendency and altogether too important an element not to be fostered in general social life and in Jewish social life in particular.

Proposition number four is: The foregoing considerations make it evident that it is advisable to have the idea Moses continue to figure in the Jewish consciousness as a means of lending moral momentum and sanction to the urge to righteousness. For a Jewish consciousness devoid of stimulating and inspiring ideas is bound to feed solely on the daily accounts of anti-Semitism and to develop a persecution complex which is apt to break the Jewish spirit altogether. In the idea Moses we have such a stimulating and inspiring idea. Let us therefore make the most of it.

The bearing of all this on the traditional God idea may at first not seem apparent because we are accustomed to treat the God-idea as *sui generis*. It would not ordinarily occur to us to draw any parallel between it and any other dominant idea which governs life. But upon further reflection we can discover no justifiable reason for this distinction. The continuity of the Jewish consciousness is maintained not by the identity of the interpretations which it gives to what it experiences and to what environs it, but in the constellation of things, persons, events, places, etc., upon which it focuses its attention. We have seen how that applies to the personality of Moses. To leave Moses out of account and to have his place taken, say by Jesus, is to change the Jewish into a Christian consciousness. By the same token, as Jews we cannot omit God from our consciousness without thereby being less Jewish. If Moses is writ large over every page of the Pentateuch—traditionally over Genesis as well as over the other five books—God is writ large over every page of our national literature. Even the scroll of Esther where He is not mentioned once unquestionably assumes Him as acting behind the scenes it describes. Interpret God as you will, provided you do so in a spirit of affirmation, but you cannot afford to ignore Him if your purpose is to cultivate a Jewish consciousness, for God is one assumed reality which has occupied the focus of its attention ever since it has been in existence.

That surely does not mean to say that the God of the Jewish consciousness in its formative stage was the same as the God in whom Jews believed and whom they worshiped in the last stage of the religious development. Then why do so many Jews today see no other alternative besides either believing in the God of tradition or omitting Him from consideration entirely? A possible reason for the "either-or" attitude is the absence of any precedence in Jewish history for so deliberate a break with tradition. The past changes in the God idea took place unconsciously. Any conscious change of time honored tradition smacks of artificiality and intellectual presumption. There is no arguing against such attitude except to deplore it as unfortunate and a menace to the future of Judaism. That attitude is a hangover from the pre-Enlightenment world-outlook which which regarded man's intention to change deliberately the environment and the course of events as tampering with God's ways. This lag in our thinking must be eliminated if we want to make any progress in the solution of the inner problem of Jewish life.

The only logical procedure with the God idea of Jewish tradition is to treat it in the same way as Ahad Ha'Am treats the idea of Moses. This means that we should formulate concerning it the following four propositions and accept the conclusions to which they lead.

The first proposition is: Even if in ac-

tual fact there did not exist such a being as the God spoken of in the Jewish writings, there is no gainsaying the fact that the conception of God has, as far as any idea can be an efficient cause, been more active as an efficient cause in the life of the Jewish people than any other single idea or even group of ideas.

The second proposition is: Of the God idea more than of any other it may with all certainty be said that it answered to some powerful urge in the soul of the Jewish people. Since all civilized peoples are known to have had some form of the God idea which must equally have answered to some compelling inner force, we cannot but conclude that the urge which gave rise to the Jewish God idea must have a basic element in common with the like urge in all other peoples. In other words, the God idea, in whatever form it is expressed, being universal evidently answers to some need that is characteristic of human nature as such. On the other hand, the differential of the Jewish God idea necessarily reflects some variant in the basic human need that finds expression in all religions. Accordingly, the problem before us is to discover the kind of urge which, while being in greater part an experience common to all people, is to some extent reflected only in the Jewish people.

To set about solving this problem in scientific fashion would involve writing a treatise based on a study of comparative religion, the psychology of religion, and on an analysis of the Jewish sources in the light of that study. Short-circuiting all these investigations and arriving at once at the conclusion of the matter, we should realize that the univeral element in human nature at the basis of all forms of religion is the urge to salvation, or self-fulfillment, or living oneself out to the full. What each people considers salvation depends upon the degree of its moral and intellectual development. The variant in the case of the Jewish people has been the articulation of this urge to salvation through the unshakable faith that the whole of existence is so conditioned as to make salvation attainable. Therein we have the unique element in the Jewish God idea. That the whole of existence is thus conditioned finds expression in the belief that God is one, the creator of the universe, and the lawgiver of mankind. The laws which must be obeyed as a means to salvation are the manner in which man must live up to reality as it is constituted, if he is to fulfill himself to the uttermost.

The third proposition is: This urge to salvation supplemented by the faith that life is so conditioned as to favor its attainment is unquestionably of sufficient value to society in general, and to the Jews in particular, to be fostered at all costs. There are some who maintain that the urge to salvation should not and cannot be symbolized by the God idea, because the God idea is associated in our minds with objectionable institutions and tendencies. This is no reason for rejecting the God-idea, any more than it is reason to reject "nationalism" or "science" for the evil company it has kept.

The fourth proposition is: These considerations point to the meaning which the God idea will gradually come to have in the consciousness of mankind. As such the God idea is not the conception of an entity identifiable by the senses or the imagination, but a conception which helps the mind to hold together in organized fashion a nexus of truths about the nature of reality, truths that give meaning and purpose to human life. From that standpoint all ideas about God, including those expressed in Jewish tradition, are to be viewed as groping attempts at seizing and articulating this nexus of truths. No attempt at ordering life can be complete without that nexus of truths which are symbolized by the God idea. No less important than holding those truths is the knowledge that human nature at its best has always sensed them.

The Jews, in their effort to render this world livable (dependent as that effort is

upon extraordinary moral support and stimulation), can least dispense with the nexus of saving truths which have been most completely synthesized in the God-idea of their own people. If the Jews were to surrender the spiritual leverage which the God idea afforded them, they would exhibit a mental inflexibility and moral obtuseness that would disqualify them for survival as a people.

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